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AUTHOR Trim, John
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ABSTRACT

A history of the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL) on the occasion of its 20th anniversary focuses on its early evolution and the research themes evident in the annual conference papers. This paper begins with a brief discussion of the longstanding relationship between the scholarly study of language and practical concern with language in society and the emergence of the field of applied linguistics with growing interest in phonetics, in the 19th century. Interest in phonetics, and then phonemics, throughout Europe, and concern for language teaching during and after World War II are chronicled. Forces acting in the early 1960s to promote international cooperation in language teaching, and subsequently to develop interinstitutional linkages in British universities with applied linguistics departments, are outlined. An analysis of the proceedings of the second meeting of the BAAL indicates the range and distribution of interest areas within applied linguistics at the time, and it is further suggested that the framework of interests has remained fairly stable over the association's history. Areas of the field in which emphasis should be strengthened, and possible directions for the next two decades, are noted. A 39-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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# APPLIED LINGUISTICS IN SOCIETY

**John Trim**
Chairperson, British Association for Applied Linguistics

The 1987 Annual Meeting marked the twentieth anniversary of the founding of our Association. It may be of interest to members who had not yet become involved in applied linguistics at that time, to recall the event and its background. That background, of course, stretches back to remote antiquity. So far as we know, the first attempts to look at language in a systematic way must have been associated with the first development of writing systems - and without writing systems, we have little access to the thoughts of our ancestors and predecessors. By definition, we pass from history into prehistory, left to gather what clues we can from the other artefacts that have survived. In that sense, an extraordinary achievement of applied linguistics is the beginning of human history. The interest in the work of the First (Icelandic) Grammarian has been in the insight it provides, exceptionally, into the reasoning that is involved in the adaptation of an alphabet in use to represent one language to meet the requirements of a hitherto unwritten language. American structuralists were impressed, even amazed, to find that reasoning very close to their own phonological, or phonemic, thinking.

The abiding work of antiquity in the codification of the classical languages was stimulated, as R H Robins has pointed out, less by scholarly enquiry than by the need to teach first Greek, then Latin, to foreigners. Hellenistic philology arose from the need of Alexandrian librarians to preserve the legacy of a Golden Age already passing away from the corruption inherent in the copying of manuscripts. Robins has pointed out, however, that the *Techne Grammatike* of Dionysios Thrax was criticised by contemporary philosophers as lowering the status of the study of language from *episteme* to *techne*, replacing attempts to understand the nature of language by mere technical descriptions of its mechanisms. Quintillian's great work on the Institutions of Oratory was conceived for practical purposes, and even starts off with some down-to-earth advice to Roman families to ensure bilingual facility for their children by having them brought up by a Greek nurse - they will, after all, be sure to pick up the Latin which is spoken all around them. We know of the political motives underlying the projects of medieval emperors, kings and bishops for grammars of vernacular languages and the creation of linguistic academies in the post-renaissance period, not to mention the interest of the Reformation in the use of linguistic expertise in promoting broader literacy to bring the newly-translated Bible to the central position in the lives of ordinary people, which lay at the heart of that movement.

The close interrelation of the scholarly study of language and practical concern with language in society is, then, by no means new. Throughout history,

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the most productive periods have been those in which theory and practice, pure science and applied science, the energetic tacklings of practical problems and serious enquiry into the nature of the world have proceeded together in partnership.

It was, however, in the nineteenth century that this partnership became fully conscious, at first in the area of phonetics. The development of phonetics in Britain came to a large extent out of the work of Ellis and Bell on the teaching of the deaf, and played a significant part in the invention of the telephone. The extraordinary flowering of phonetics in Leipzig in the 1850s seems to have resulted from the coincidence of medical, musical and philological interests. The result was the neogrammarian revolution in linguistics, turning the direction of study away from the reconstruction of linguistic prehistory to the study of the contemporary spoken language and the attested processes of language change. Many of the neogrammarian scholars became actively involved in the reform of language teaching in schools, both of the mother tongue and of foreign languages. The International Phonetics Association grew out of the Phonetic Teachers Association and its journal, *Le Maître Phonétique (mf)* retained a "section des eleves", consisting of phonetically transcribed text ostensibly for use with pupils in language classes right up to its recent demise. Wilhelm Vietor, perhaps best remembered now for his pamphlet "Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren", was active up till the first world war with Passy, Jespersen, Klinghardt and others in the movement to reform modern language teaching.

In the inter-war period, Daniel Jones' Department of Phonetics at University College London was almost exclusively concerned with the teaching of pronunciation, succeeding for a short period in introducing a phonetic method into the general teaching of modern foreign languages in British schools and also providing a phonetic training for many teachers of English as a mother-tongue. The courses held at University College in the phonetics of English for foreign teachers of English, with their clear-cut methodology, were enormously influential and Jones' *Outline of English Phonetics* and his *English Pronouncing Dictionary* were regarded as carrying ultimate authority. Jones also instituted a lectureship in the grammar of spoken English, held with distinction by H.E.Palmer and later, though with less enthusiasm, by J.R.Firth. In his pre-war departmental brochure, Jones explicitly recognised the teaching of English as a foreign language as a legitimate field for post-graduate research. He was also active in devising orthographies for hitherto unwritten colonial languages, based on the phoneme principle. For a full generation, this concept of the "phoneme" dominated linguistic theory and, by extension to other levels of linguistic organisation, provided the basic model according to which structuralism analysed language and flourished, particularly in the United States, until the day came when it could find no effective response to the theoretical onslaught of



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Chomsky and his followers.

The generalisation of the "emic" principle in the United States was largely attributable to Bloomfield and his successors, particularly Pike, Bloch and Hockett. Bloomfield was essentially a neogrammarian, with a late, scarcely assimilated conversion to Watsonian behaviourism. His textbook *Language* (1935) remained the standard text until about 1960. Bloomfield also concerned himself with the application of linguistics in the educational field. Together with his pupil and collaborator, the eminent lexicographer, Clarence Barnhart, he devised a method of teaching reading, *Let's read.* Based on his dictum that writing is not language but simply its archaeology, a mere secondary representation, Bloomfield considered that learning to read contained no component of language learning. He had no truck with centres of interest, vocabulary development and the like, ruthlessly subordinating everything to the sorting of lexical material so as to present the phoneme/grapheme correspondence as being as straightforward as possible, until the learner has grasped the fundamental analytical principle involved. Dealing with the notorious anomalies in English spelling was, in his view, a relatively trivial matter. Having some sympathy with this point of view, my wife and I used the method with our children. It proved highly successful and yet self-defeating. Our children rapidly grasped the phonemic principle embodied in the alphabet. Having done so, they proceeded to read books for pleasure and had no further interest in the reader. Perhaps that is a confirmation of Bloomfield's view!

However, it is for the application of structuralist and behaviourist principles to the teaching of foreign languages during the Second World War and then under the provisions of the National Defence Education Act in the post-war period that the contributions of the Bloomfieldians to applied linguistics are probably best known. I imagine that many of our language laboratories are still dependent on Audio-Lingual Materials for their coverage of many languages. I do not think that the Broomfieldians ever held the view frequently ascribed to them, that learning a language was simply a matter of habit-formation. Their psycholinguistic basis was rather that the higher functions involved in the formulation and understanding of speech can only operate properly if the lower level mechanisms become automatised and removed from consciousness. This is not, of course, a view confined to behaviourist linguists. "Clumping" is a concept which appeals to common sense. I recall that all the various manuals of military training during my service with the infantry began: "The aim of all weapon training is to teach the recruit so to handle his weapon that his actions become instinctive and all thoughts may be concentrated on how best to kill the enemy" (I trust that by recalling this model specification of objectives I have not rendered myself and my publisher liable for prosecution under Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act).

Mastering a foreign language, alas, is rather more complex than loading and firing a Bren gun and dealing with its stoppages, as when "Gun fires one or two rounds and stops - AGAIN!" Phonology and morphology, dealing with relatively small closed sets, respond well to techniques of habit formation, as they also generally confirm the predictions of interference theory, the most characteristic contribution of structuralist theory to applied linguistics. So do the short holistic phrases which make up much of transactional language and the routine aspects of everyday interactions; the learning of which has largely replaced the learning of grammatical structures in the name of communication. Syntax is quite a different matter. The spontaneous formulation of thought and the way in which the listener constructs meaning on the basis of another person's speech cannot be accounted for in simple terms as choices from pre-established repertories or combinations of pre-formed modules. Chomsky's renowned review of Skinner's *Verbal Behaviour* was immediately decisive.

Unfortunately, Chomskyan linguistics, in the 30 years since that review, appears to have contributed little or nothing to the development of applied linguistics, that is to say, to our empirical understanding of the workings of language in the individual and society, and the application of that knowledge, in an interdisciplinary framework, to the treatment of problems of language acquisition, learning and use. Indeed, Chomsky foresaw clearly that this would be the case. The distinction of 'competence' and 'performance', initially helpful in creating space for an autonomous linguistics could be - and has been used to insulate linguistics from empirical accountability. As the early excitement of psychologists over its apparent implications for child language acquisition has faded, it seems probable that mainstream linguistics has never been so academically encapsulated, with so little interest in its social consequences and having so little to contribute to the understanding and solution of the many urgent language problems with which society and the individuals which compose it find themselves faced, at a time when communication, still predominantly through the medium of natural language, is becoming more complex, more problematic, more central to organised society. It is surely a cause for great regret and deep concern if professional academic linguists are so absorbed by problems of government and binding in syntax that communication engineers, information technologists, logopedists and aphasiologists, language planners, translators and interpreters, educationists concerned with normal child language development and the language aspects of learning across the curriculum as well as all those concerned with the consequences of the increasing internationalisation of life, from the management of multinational corporations, the conduct of international and supranational organisations and authorities to the impact on individual lives of personal mobility and the need for access to information, must all fend for themselves and develop, ad hoc, their particular linguistic expertise.

It is, of course, the fundamental *raison d'etre* of our Association to bring together academic linguists and phoneticians with practising members of the various professions that use language as a tool, or have to deal with social problems with a significant language component. This breadth of concern was laid down at the Inaugural Meeting in Reading in 1967, though a more restricted field had originally been envisaged. BAAL came into existence as the British affiliate of the International Association for Applied Linguistics, usually known as AILA, the acronym of its French title, which itself came into existence before any of the 40 or so national affiliates which now compose it. Following the signature of the European Convention for Cultural Cooperation, meetings were held in Strasbourg and in Stockholm to consider a programme for the promotion of language learning in the states signatory to the Convention. It was clear, even at that time, that the ever closer cultural cooperation among European countries to be expected with the development of increasingly close social, economic and political links intended by the Council of Europe and the Treaty of Rome, would require a great increase in the quantity and quality of language teaching in all member countries and at all levels. It was at first hoped that a European Language Institute could be established, but this project foundered owing to the non-availability of finances and, at that early stage, the absence of the necessary political will.

Recently, following the agreement of the member states of the European Community to replace the Treaty of Rome in 1992 by a closer form of union, it has become a matter of much greater urgency to equip young people with the knowledge, understanding and skills they will certainly need to meet the challenges of the new Europe, and to take the necessary steps to provide the facilities which will enable adults to cope with the demands, linguistic and cultural, that the opportunities and pressures for personal mobility will bring. In these circumstances, a European Language Institute could perform a most useful function and international pressure for its establishment is again mounting, as Professor van Els' contribution to this volume indicates.

In 1962, however, the moment was not ripe and it was decided instead to launch a 10-year major Project under the aegis of the Council of Europe, with the objects of establishing good working relations among institutions in different member countries concerned with language teaching, promoting the adoption of the (at that time) new audio-visual methodology and, more generally, encouraging the close cooperation between academic linguists and practising language teachers. To this end AILA was founded and throughout the 60s a series of *stages* were organised in different member countries, in which a European policy on language teaching was gradually evolved, culminating in Recommendation (69)2 of the Committee of Ministers, which had a powerful influence on the language policies of the member states of the Council of Eu-

rope. It was customary to hold meetings of the AILA committee in connection with the Council of Europe *stages* and to use the occasion to encourage the foundation of national affiliates or to strengthen those already in existence. In this process, an indefatigable role was played by our late Swedish colleague, Max Gorosh. In 1964, a first small-scale International Colloquy on Applied Linguistics was organised by the Association Française de Linguistique Appliquée in Nancy. The second was to be held in Britain. A great deal of preliminary work was undertaken by the University of Essex, which found that the existence of a sponsoring organisation was a prerequisite for official support. It was in that context that the decision to found BAAL was taken, with the proposed aims and objectives the same as those of AILA. These were not solely confined to foreign language teaching. International organisations are obliged to spend a high proportion of their resources on interpretation and translation, and machine translation was included in the AILA remit as an area in which the application of linguistics might produce valuable economies. In fact, disillusion with the machine translation set in during the sixties, as the complexity of the translation process was revealed, and the fading of that interest left language teaching as the sole concern.

The proposal to found a British Association of Applied Linguistics came opportunely. Starting with the School of Applied Linguistics in Edinburgh, a number of universities had set up departments of applied linguistics, largely to provide the professionalisation of the teaching of English as a foreign language which the British Council considered to be necessary in the national interest, especially at a time when the common use of English was seen to be an important factor in the survival of the Commonwealth as an effective political and economic partnership. The first attempts to join the Common Market had encountered resistance, and led the British Government to stimulate increased proficiency in foreign languages. The Committee on Research and Development in Modern Languages was set up and commissioned research in that field on a substantial scale from the newly established Departments of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics. Language Centres were established in universities and polytechnics. Language laboratories were set up in schools, involving substantial investment and the Nuffield Foundation, later Schools Council, projects for the development of audio-visual language courses were generously funded, with the intention of stiffening the modern languages provision in comprehensive secondary schools and in primary schools, both of which meant a great extension of modern language provision, placing considerable strain on teaching resources. It was at this time that the Centre for Information on Language Teaching was instituted. As a result there was a great swell of interest on the part of teachers in the help they might receive from linguists in the difficult yet promising situation they were facing. A language teaching section was set up in the Lin-

guistics Association of Great Britain, itself still a young body, the meetings of which were animated and enthusiastic, but from the point of view of professional academic linguists and applied linguists, prone to be opiniated and ill-informed. The professionals felt the need to form a professional association, in which well-qualified people could exchange experience and informed opinion on the development of a new disciplinary area of which much was expected and whose resources were already under some strain. The interest aroused by the BAAL proposal was considerable and the inaugural meeting at Reading was well-attended and enthusiastic.

A number of us felt, however, that a constitutional restriction of BAAL's concerns to language teaching (not only modern foreign languages; under the influence of M.A.K.Halliday the teaching of English as a Mother Tongue was also brought in) and machine translation was too limiting. Members of Departments of Linguistics were present because of their wish to see the findings of the science brought to bear on the social problems of the day. We felt that though language teaching would undoubtedly be the most active field of application in the immediate future, it was unnecessary and inadvisable to tie the hands of ourselves and our successors when they wished to respond to new needs, some of which we could foresee, but others - perhaps the most important - might arise in an unexpected fashion. Although the main driving force was undoubtedly the need of members of Departments of Applied Linguistics and colleagues in language centres to create a forum for the discussion of their common problems in professionalising language teaching (especially EFL) and agreeing its theoretical basis, the wider view prevailed and BAAL accepted, at least in principle, the wider remit.

In the event, the University of Essex was unable to proceed with the organisation of a second International Colloquy and I agreed to organise what became the Second International Congress of Applied Linguistics in Cambridge in 1969. The wider remit was represented in the title of the Congress and its Proceedings: *Applications of Linguistics*. In the plenary sessions and in the section meetings, we attempted to represent as wide a range as possible of the areas of concern to which applied linguistics should address itself. The 14 sections were:

**Section 1**. Linguistics applied to literary texts; (3 papers)
**Section 2**. Computer analysis of texts, (covering applications to information retrieval and language teaching); leader R.Wisby (4 papers)
**Section 3**. Research in the psychology of first language learning; leader D.Bruce (4 papers)

I suppose now we should say "acquisition and learning"; at the time we wished to indicate that we should welcome studies such as that presented by John Mountford on "initial standard literacy" as well as that from David Crys-

tal on "non-segmental phonology in first language acquisition".
**Section 4**. Research in the psychology of second language learning; leader P.Pimslow (14 papers)
**Section 5**. Speech research and its applications; leader G.Fant (8 papers, mostly concerned with educational applications such as the teaching of the deaf and second language learning, but also treating automatic speech recognition)
**Section 6**. Technology of language learning; leader R.A.Becher (21 papers, mostly concerned with the language laboratory, including Peter Streven's pointed question: "Where has all the money gone?", but also covering broadcast-led multi-media courses, computer-assisted instruction and the use of closed-circuit television in the teaching of phonetics)
**Section 7**. Language teaching methods and material; leader A.Hood Roberts (30 papers, divided into two sub-sections, 17 on materials, 13 on methodology)
**Section 8**. Linguistic aspects of speech disorders and therapy; leader S.Smith (6 Papers, covering both developmental and generative disorders)
**Section 9**. Lexicography; leader B.Quemada (12 papers, covering dictionary-making, thesaurus construction, terminology development and vocabulary acquisition and learning)
**Section 10**. Language testing material; leader A.Davies (8 papers, all concerned with second or foreign language testing)
**Section 11**. Measurement and classification of second language error; leader S.P.Corder (6 papers)
**Section 12**. Theory of translation; leader W.Wiles (4 papers, covering interpretation as well as written translation)
**Section 13**. Contrastive linguistics; leader G.Nickel (19 papers)
**Section 14**. Sociolinguistics; leader J.Gumperz (9 papers, only one concerned with foreign language learning)

It will be seen that of the 147 papers presented to sections, 103 or 70% were devoted to second or foreign language learning. The remaining 30%, 44 papers, ranged over literary analysis, information retrieval, child language acquisition, literacy, language development programmes for the disadvantaged, speech pathology and therapy, automatic speech recognition, dictionary and thesaurus construction, terminology development, translation and interpretation, language planning, language attitudes, language register and variety, differentiation of standard languages, language and drug abuse.

In his plenary presentation, Joshua Fishman, taking Fergusson and Morgan's 1959 classification of applied linguistics in the United States, added the creation of writing systems, orthographic reform and societal bilingualism. In his survey of applied computational linguistics, in addition to areas explored in the corresponding section, David Hays covered concordance-writing, grammatical pars-



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ing programmes, correction of typing errors, topic and attitudinal analysis, editing, tutorials, question-answering systems and man-machine communication. In all these areas, explicit linguistic information must be programmed into the computer for it to operate. Many applications which at that time were at an early stage of development have now become commonplace, and many others have come into general use which were not listed - in some cases not foreseen, even in Fujimura's sophisticated account of computer technology in language teaching and testing. Some applications, notably machine translation and automatic speech recognition (as opposed to speech synthesis, which has achieved a high level of realism at the phonetic level and is now rapidly developing at higher levels) have proved more recalcitrant than engineers had anticipated. The obstacles to progress seem to be over-whelmingly of linguistic, or even psycholinguistic character.

As a result of the participation in the 1969 AILA Congress of applied linguists from all parts of the world, some 700 all told, AILA rapidly expanded, outgrowing its European origins and moving from the sphere of the Council of Europe to that of UNESCO, which has recently accorded AILA Category 'B' status. The concern of the 40 national affiliates of AILA and its scientific commissions are still weighted towards aspects of language teaching, but the wider remit has continued to provide the framework for successive Congresses. The VIIIth Congress, recently held in Sydney, Australia, had 20 sections, for which 340 papers were announced. Of these 150, or 44% were concerned with second or foreign languages. This shows a markedly less dominant position than the 70% of papers in Cambridge. The other topics covered at Cambridge were all still represented in the section papers, meetings of AILA scientific commissions and special symposia which together made up the programme of the Congress. There were, however, shifts of interest. 46 papers were offered in discourse analysis, and 53 in the various areas of language planning and the problems of multilingual societies, such as minority languages, contact languages, pidgins and creoles, multilingualism, migrant education, etc. On the other hand, interest in contrastive linguistics and error analysis was greatly reduced, and had moved from phonological and grammatical studies to pragmatics, speech acts and cross-cultural studies. Interest in the area of educational technology had shifted almost entirely from the language laboratory to the role of computer technology, in which only one section paper had been offered 20 years earlier. A few topics, such as language and sex and language and ideology, which had not been treated in Cambridge, found some interest and support at Sydney.

Some of the changes noted may, of course, be attributable to regional differences of emphasis. Applied linguists in Australia are greatly concerned with the transition from previous White Australia policy to a multi-racial and multicultural policy, which has brought with it the need to re-think migrant and abo-

riginal education, whilst questions of language planning (including the development of national standard languages and their role in education and other aspects of the national life) are of vital importance to the developing ex-colonial countries of South East Asia (and, of course, elsewhere). Other changes indicate new priorities in response to new situations. Overall, however, the general framework of concerns has remained remarkably stable over the last twenty years. This fact does not indicate stagnation. An analysis of the papers offered within the sections would show the extent to which the treatment of each theme has moved on. It does indicate that the areas delineated at Cambridge are of permanent concern to applied linguists. Our Association should be keeping them all under review and acting as a focus for the interaction of all the different categories of scholars and professional colleagues involved. It is of great importance that the problems of language in society should be seen and treated as one interconnected whole, and not allowed to disintegrate into a chaos of unconnected specialisms. We are, of course, strongest in the areas of EFL, modern languages and mainstream English teaching. We have a good representation, which we must cherish, of colleagues working with ethnic minorities and with the speech and language handicapped. We should strengthen links with lexicographers, translators and interpreters and particularly with those involved in communications engineering and information technology. We should seek for opportunities to involve professional language users in the legal profession (the most responsible and meticulous codifiers and manipulators of language), journalism and the mass media, politics and public administration, industrial management. How else are we to create an informed public opinion, so obviously lacking when language issues are discussed? We should ask ourselves, in all seriousness: what have they to offer, out of their experience, to applied linguistics and what has applied linguistics to offer to them? What, in fact, prevents us from recognising in them fellow applied linguists? Why is this so and what can we do about it?

For the most part, this paper has been retrospective in character. What of the next twenty years? Perhaps the first thing to say is that twenty years is not so very long a period. One would expect the majority of today's social language problems still to be with us. Some uncertainties may be resolved. Will the ethnic minority communities maintain their languages and cultures, or will they assimilate into the host community as the younger generations are continuously exposed to its many pressures? What predictions are made by socio-linguistic theory? What difference to theory will it make if those predictions are not fulfilled? Or to the advice we should give for the handling of the rather different kind of mobility to be expected after 1992, when the new arrangements for European unity come into effect? Are we to expect an accelerated interpenetration of national languages and cultures? If so, what will the language behaviour of

Europe look and sound like in the early twenty-first century? How far will the new technologies have developed? Will electronic speech recognition and machine translation have been achieved? If so, what will be the consequences for man-machine communication and for language learning and use? What is the future for language teachers? In what ways will their role and the status change? Will readier access to information and the improvement of telecommunications make language learning more of an autonomous process with less dependence on teaching? Can interpretation and translation continue to bear the brunt of international communication? Will the increasing volume of international communication reach the point where a single second language will become a necessary part of compulsory education? Will it be a natural language or will the Esperanto lobby have become powerful enough to achieve its own universalist dream? The questions crowd in and, of course, the most important is often the one no-one had asked! We seem to be in the midst of revolutionary changes brought about by communications and information technology which are rapidly making the traditional structures of society irrelevant and obsolete. How will our own society, as a more-or-less integrated part of Europe in a shrinking world context, respond to the challenge? What will be the role of language in that response, and what will be the consequent demands upon all those who, in so many different ways, are professionally concerned with language? What will the linguists, theoretical and applied, who have decided to devote their careers to the understanding of this phenomenon central to human existence do to influence and monitor events? As Chairperson of BAAL, one feels also obliged to pose the final question: when the Chairperson in 2007 looks back over the previous twenty years, what will he or she be able to say that the British Association for Applied Linguistics has done to make things better?

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